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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7288  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000129

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN BRIAN RORAFF; G/TIP FOR MEGAN HALL,  
JENNIFER DONNELLY, AND SHEREEN FARAJ; INL/AAE FOR ANDREW  
BUHLER  
MOSCOW FOR LISA KIERANS AND JOANNA MELVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CVIS](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [TU](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UZBEK MIGRANTS EYE VISA-FREE TURKEY

REF: A. 07 TASHKENT 1681  
[1](#)B. ANKARA 89  
[1](#)C. 07 TASHKENT 1829

Classified By: Poloff Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On January 13 poloff, who previously served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bukhara, learned that his Uzbek former counterpart teacher was departing immediately -- and possibly forever -- for Turkey. Having been frustrated at recent attempts to find work abroad in Russia, Cyprus, and the United Kingdom, the veteran English language teacher and former U.S. program alumna decided to take advantage of a recent change in Turkish policy granting Uzbek citizens visa-free entry into Turkey. By January 24, having depleted her modest cash reserves and unable to secure legal employment, she returned to Tashkent. The story is a troubling example of just how desperate highly educated but poorly compensated professionals are to escape Uzbekistan; life is especially complicated for single women who must deal with social stigmas in addition to dismally low salaries. The new Turkish visa regime will likely lead to a surge in the number of intending immigrants arriving from Central Asia, and many will likely be trafficked. End summary.

Will the last one out of Bukhara Please Turn Off the Lights?  
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[1](#)2. (C) Poloff, who previously served in Bukhara as a Peace Corps Volunteer (2002-04), learned on January 13 that his former colleague and Peace Corps-designated

counterpart/mentor intended to depart immediately -- and preferably forever -- for Turkey. The veteran English teacher, who is a U.S. exchange program alumna, earns less than USD 100 per month on her official salary despite years of experience as Chair of her English Department and a Master's degree. She is in her late thirties and unmarried, so suffers from a cultural stigma as an "old maid," especially in the rural village of Romitan in Bukhara Province where her extended family resides. She has also been frequently harassed by local National Security Service agents due to her friendship with poloff, possession of U.S.-donated educational materials, and participation in U.S.-sponsored travel abroad (reftel A). She confided that she was trying very hard to go abroad -- "I love my hometown but I need to earn more money." She had scoured the Internet in search of teaching opportunities abroad, and naively trusted many Internet contacts about alleged opportunities on earlier occasions.

13. (C) This Bukhara teacher is not alone in her aspirations to emigrate. Another former colleague, also a talented English teacher and U.S. program alumna, made her way to England as a tourist and has no intention of coming back, and hopes to "become legal" by marrying a British citizen. A third capable English teacher, former colleague, and U.S. program alumna tried to return to the U.S., this time with her family, but did not get by our visa regime. Poloff's former counterpart has four brothers, three of whom live in Russia while one remains in Bukhara Province due to a mental disability. Poloff reminisced with his former colleague while looking at photo albums, and more than half of the male students poloff taught -- who are approximately 21 years old now -- have already left for Russia to work and, in some cases, to work and study. One exceptional student is even studying in America, which to Bukharans means he made it big. Poloff strolled around the frozen streets of Bukhara two weeks ago and the few young men around said a lot of their friends are doing construction in Kazakhstan. One had borrowed thousands of dollars from relatives to buy a car (vehicles are overpriced in Uzbekistan due to strict import controls that protect UzDaewoo's monopoly), and is hoping to repay everyone and make a living as an unofficial taxi driver.

"No Uzbeks Like Living in Russia"

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14. (C) While large numbers of Uzbeks are migrating north to find work in Russia and, increasingly, Kazakhstan, the bulk of the available work is grueling manual labor. Professionals prefer to find opportunities farther afield in western Europe or, against the odds, in the U.S. Poloff's counterpart first borrowed money last fall -- in typical Uzbek fashion -- from a group of family members to make the journey to Russia. The bus journey from Bukhara to Moscow cost USD 200 one-way and took four days, longer than necessary because of delays at customs and border checkpoints. She reported that it is now tougher to get official registration than it used to be, and it is necessary to bribe local officials and hope that they actually follow through and stamp the papers. While she could have found work as a cleaning lady, she could not get work authorization to teach. She said the high cost of living is also a problem, even when sharing room and board with other countrymen. Hardy Uzbeks can handle cold weather, but she said Uzbeks feel mistreated in Russia and and tolerate life there only out of economic necessity. Numerous Bukharans told poloff that laborers all share a desire to return home for good someday, and they invest their hard-earned money by gradually constructing new houses in their native Bukhara. The partially-built abodes are also considered safer places to invest than banks.

Cyprus as a Stepping Stone?

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15. (C) Many Uzbeks are apparently looking to Cyprus as a possible working destination or entry-point, as poloff's

former counterpart teacher did recently. A group of Bukharans made Internet contact with someone who said they could set them up with work on the Greek side of the island (Note: Uzbeks are a Turkic people, but it's the European Union that they are interested in. End note.) There is a sense, also noticed by our consular staff in Tashkent, that intending immigrants believe that Cyprus must be easier to enter since it is a new, far-flung corner of the European Union. Poloff's former counterpart hoped to find any sort of work in Cyprus and then, once she had a firm footing on European Union soil, eventually move to the United Kingdom. The group unsuccessfully tried to obtain Cyprus visas in Russia (again believing that an application from outside of Uzbekistan would have a greater chance of approval), and other Uzbeks reportedly obtained documents but were turned back en route. She returned, in debt to her circle of relatives, to Uzbekistan.

#### Turkey and Bust

16. (C) As of August 1, 2007 Turkey implemented a new policy eliminating a visa requirement for nationals of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Mongolia. Georgian, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz citizens already enjoyed visa-free travel, so all Central Asians can now simply board a plane for Istanbul and receive a 30-day tourist stamp at the airport (reftel B). However, many Uzbeks do not understand or choose to ignore issues like immigration status or work authorization and believe that they can enter Turkey and find work. Poloff's former counterpart teacher thus borrowed more money from her family for a chance at redemption and higher wages in Turkey and purchased a round-trip plane ticket for about \$600. She made Internet contacts with English language schools who provided her free lodging while she unsuccessfully tried to adjust her status. In accordance with Turkish laws, several educational institutions refused to employ her without the necessary papers despite genuine interest in her skills. She was offered illegal employment at some cafes and hotels (most Uzbeks speak Russian, which was of interest to Turkish entrepreneurs), but she was uncomfortable with the arrangements -- and aggressive attention from Turkish men -- and returned to Uzbekistan once her meager pocket money was gone.

17. (C) Poloff spoke with Ela Beskardes-Karagol, Second Secretary at the Turkish Embassy in Tashkent, who confirmed

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that the numbers of Uzbeks traveling to Turkey are increasing since the visa regime was lifted. She noted that "every plane is full," but they do not have statistics yet as to whether there is an increase in the number of Uzbeks trafficked to Turkey or unlawfully present. However, she noted that the Turkish Foreign Ministry is well aware of the potential risks and said they are investigating several claims. Turkey was already one of the top five destination countries for trafficked Uzbeks before the more lenient visa regime took effect, according to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM)-affiliated organization Istiqbolli Avlod (reftel C). Beskardes-Karagol added that Turkey implemented this new policy as a unilateral move with no expectation of reciprocity by Uzbekistan or the other affected countries. The Turkish Embassy does issue work visas to Uzbeks, but only when there is an approved petition from a potential employer; fraud among Uzbek applicants to Turkey is common.

#### How About Tashkent?

18. (C) Decompressing from her failed trip to Turkey, poloff's former counterpart teacher pondered a move to Tashkent, but even that is fraught with difficulties. Uzbeks from other regions require an internal residency permit from a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to move to another location within the country, especially to Tashkent. She

estimated a residency stamp in her domestic passport would cost close to USD 1,000, and of course the cost-of-living is higher. However, poloff also met one of her former students, a wealthy Bukharan whose family recently relocated to Tashkent for better business connections, and the young man advised his former teacher to obtain a temporary six-month residency permit to stay in Tashkent and renew it every six months -- "it's what all of us really do." He noted that Uzbek law does permit citizens to look for work upon receipt of a temporary residence permit, and said the official cost is the equivalent of five dollars. However, he conceded the actual cost is at least fifty dollars "if you want to ensure it gets processed without problems." The teacher was relieved to discover the bribe was more affordable than she anticipated, and the contrast between impoverished teacher and her affluent former student was striking.

Comment:

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19. (C) While the subject in this story was uncomfortable with the idea of working illegally in Turkey in a menial job, it is clear that the word is out among attentive Uzbeks that Turkey is easy to get into. Even highly educated Uzbeks can be naive about regulations and, worse, may be willing to trust unknown Internet sources about employment opportunities. This will almost certainly lead to an increase in the number of trafficking-in-persons cases from Uzbekistan, the most populous country in the region, to Turkey. European Union countries may remain the promised land, but remittance-hungry Uzbeks will likely start pooling funds to help laborers get to Turkey, with whom they share some linguistic and cultural ties. Turkey's visa-free policy may generate more goodwill in Central Asia than it bargained for.

NORLAND